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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005007

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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN VISITS TO WEST BANK STIR CONTROVERSY

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5 (b)(d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) The visit of two Jordanian delegations to the West Bank earlier this month has fueled speculation among some quarters about the GOJ's future role in the West Bank. On June 2-3, a group of retired Jordanian generals conducted a Track II related visit to Israel and the West Bank. Separately, GOJ military and media representatives visited two Jordanian field hospitals in the West Bank, and inadvertently interacted with a member of the al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigades in Janin. Misleading press reports about the purpose of the visits and sensitivity about a future Jordanian role in the West Bank may have prompted Interior Minister Habashneh's public statement that the GOJ intended only to support the Palestinians in rebuilding their institutions. However, the Islamic opposition in Jordan (and some Palestinians) are not convinced. End Summary.

VISITS RAISE SPECTER OF FUTURE JORDANIAN WEST BANK ROLE

12. (C) The visit of two Jordanian groups has raised the issue of Jordan's future role in the West Bank. Retired Gen. Mansour Abu Rashid, a decorated Jordanian general who now chairs the pro-peace Amman Center for Peace and Development, told PolOff on June 15 that he had led a group of retired Jordanian generals to Israel on June 2-3 (as he has done frequently in the past). During the visit, the group met various Israeli military and political leaders, toured the Jordan Valley, and viewed the separation barrier from both the Israel and West Bank side. He said during the visit the Jordanians offered suggestions of how to alleviate the hardship on the Palestinian population. "As a military man," he told PolOff, "I support the wall, but on the 1967 borders." He said that the suffering of the Palestinian population is palpable and not sustainable, but he believes that the Israelis have workable plans in mind to ease passage though the barrier, such as increasing the number of gates.

13. (C) Separately, Ali al-Ayed, the head of Foreign Minister Muasher's private office, confirmed to PolCouns June 15 that a media group from the Armed Forces' public relations office and Jordan TV had traveled to Jenin and Ramallah a week later to tour Jordanian field hospitals to prepare a news report. During the visit to Ramallah, the group "interacted" with at least one member of the al-Aqsa Brigades as reported in press reports, but the contact was inadvertent, according to Ayed.

WHY ALL THE FUSS?

14. (C) The visits spurred a flurry of press reports about the two groups' activities, some inaccurately suggesting that both were official visits intended as fact-finding missions to prepare for a future Jordanian role in the West Bank (behind the back of the Palestinian Authority). The press reports fueled suspicion in some quarters that the Jordanians (at Israel and the U.S.'s behest) were contemplating a future role in West Bank security or governance. For example, the Islamic Action Front's mouthpiece (and largest circulation weekly in Jordan) al-Sabil front-paged an editorial on June 15 voicing these concerns, suggesting that many Jordanians did not believe GOJ explanations on the matter. The editorial was accompanied by a lengthy news article discussing the recent Jordanian visits to the West Bank.

15. (C) Although he acknowledged he could not speak to GOJ intentions, Gen. Abu Rashid said that Jordanian involvement in the West Bank is a highly sensitive issue on both sides of the river, noting that most Palestinians in the West Bank (and some in Jordan) strongly oppose a Jordanian presence there. While they may accept Jordanian humanitarian assistance, help in rebuilding institutions, and training of security forces, most would strenuously oppose the physical presence of Jordanian troops or police on West Bank land. He said that Palestinians -- particularly those who only have known life under occupation -- do not reminisce favorably about Jordanian rule pre-1967. Many Palestinians would

perceive a Jordanian presence in the West Bank (as he suspects the Israelis may want on some level) as if they are trading one occupation for another, according to Abu Rashid.

COMMENT

16. (C) The Jordanian visits to the West Bank were completely routine, but the worried reactions were not. Public discussion of an Egyptian security role in Gaza is most likely making Jordanians and Palestinians hyper-sensitive to any action that may imply that Jordan seeks a similar direct role in the West Bank.

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